

Sergei

Catechism of the Revolutionist

Nechayev

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Sergei Nechayev

“Voici le temps des assassins”

"Yet some internal voice tells me that Nechayev, who has irrevocably perished and without doubt knows he has perished will this time summon from the depths of his being, fouled and soiled but far from vulgar, all his original energy and courage. He will perish as a hero, and this time he will betray nothing and nobody. Such is my belief. We shall soon see whether I am right."

Bakunin

CATECHISM OF THE REVOLUTIONIST 1869

I

General Principles of the Organization

(1.) The structure of the organization is based on individual trust.

(2.) The organizer (himself a member) selects five or six persons from amongst his acquaintances and, having held a separate discussion with and secured the consent of each, assembles them together and lays the foundation of a closed cell.

(3.) The mechanism of the organization is concealed from idle eyes, and therefore the whole range of contacts and all the activities of the cell are kept secret from everybody, with the exception of its members and the central cell, to whom the organizer submits a full report on specified dates.

(4.) Members undertake specialized duties in accordance with a definite plan drawn up on the basis of a knowledge of the locality, social class or milieu in which the preparatory work is to be carried out.

(5.) A member of the organization immediately forms in his turn a second-degree cell around himself, in relation to which the previously formed cell assumes the role of a central cell, which all the members of the organization (or, in relation to the second-degree cells, the organizers) supply with the sum total of information obtained through their own cells; this is submitted to the next cell upwards.

(6.) The principle of non-operation by direct methods with regard to all those persons who can be operated upon with equal success indirectly, that is, through other people, must be observed with the utmost scrupulousness.

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(7.) The organization's general principle is not to attempt to convince, that is, not to cultivate but to consolidate those forces which are already in evidence, to eliminate all discussions which bear no relation to its aim.

(8.) Members do not ask the organizer questions whose purpose is unconnected with the business of subordinate cells.

(9.) The total frankness of members with the organizer is the basis for the successful progress of the cause.

(10.) Upon the formation of second-category cells, previously organized cells become centres in relation to them, and are supplied with the society's regulations and a definite programme of its activities in the location in which it is situated.

General Principles of the Network of Sections

(1.) The purpose of the sections is to achieve the independence and autonomy of the organization's work and their use as an extra guarantee of the security of the common cause.

(2.) These sections consist initially of two or three persons authorized by the network and with the committee's approval. On the basis of the organization's general principles, they select a group from only those cells which, in the committee's opinion, fulfil their requirements. Contact with the network is maintained through the organizers.

(3.) Persons selected from the cells to membership of a section pledge themselves at the first meeting: *a)* to act concertedly, collectively, in total subordination to the voice of the majority, and to leave the section solely for the purpose of entry into even more intimate ranks, on the instructions of the committee; *b)* at the same time they pledge themselves, in all their relationships with the outside world, to bear in mind only the good of the society.

(4.) Persons are selected to membership of a section only one at a time. When the number reaches six, the section is divided into groups, on the instructions of the committee.

(5.) A person is jointly elected to take charge of clerical work, the compilation of reports, the reception and dispatch of committee members and other agents having a relation to

the section as a whole. The same person takes custody of documents and property, and keeps addresses.

(6.) The other members undertake to carry out preparatory work in a particular class or milieu, and select for themselves assistants from amongst persons organized according to the general principles.

(7.) All the persons organized in accordance with the general principles are regarded as and used as a means of or implements for performing the undertakings and achieving the aim of the society. Therefore in any business to be executed by the section, the overall nature of the plan for this business or undertaking must be known only to the section; the persons executing the business must not under any circumstances know its true nature but merely those details, those parts of the business which it has fallen to their lot to perform. In order to arouse their enthusiasm it is vital to represent the nature of the business in a false light.

(8.) Members inform the committee of the plan for an undertaking conceived by them, and only with the committee's consent do they set about implementing it.

(9.) A plan proposed by the committee is implemented immediately. To prevent the committee from making demands in excess of the section's power, a record as strict and accurate as possible is maintained of the state of the section, through its channels of contact with the committee.

(10.) A section may send its members to inspect subordinate cells and dispatch them to fresh places in order to found new organizations.

(11.) The question of financial resources is of prime importance:

a) a direct levy upon members and sympathizers, made on a committee form, with the amount of the donation set out in words;

b) an indirect levy, on plausible pretexts, upon persons of all estates, albeit non-sympathizers;

c) arrangement of concerts, evenings, nominally for different purposes;

d) various enterprises with regard to private individuals;

the section is forbidden to use any other more ambitious methods, which are beyond its powers, and only upon the instructions of the committee should the section promote the implementation of any such plan;

e) one-third of the entire receipts is to go to the committee.

(12.) Amongst the conditions necessary for a section to commence its activities are:

a) the formation of dens;

b) infiltration of its clever and practical men into the milieu of peddlers, bakers, etc.;

c) knowledge of the town gossips, prostitutes, and other private [means] of gathering and dissemination of rumours;

d) knowledge of the police and the world of old clerks;

e) establishment of relations with the so-called criminal elements of society;

f) influence over high-ranking persons through their womenfolk;

g) continual propaganda by all possible means.

This copy is not to be circulated but kept in the section.

II

Principles by which the Revolutionary Must Be Guided

THE ATTITUDE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY TOWARDS HIMSELF

(1.) The revolutionary is a dedicated man. He has no interests of his own, no affairs, no feelings, no attachments, no belongings, not even a name. Everything in him is absorbed by a single exclusive interest, a single thought, a single passion—the revolution.

(2.) In the very depths of his being, not only in words but also in deeds, he has broken every tie with the civil order and the entire cultured world, with all its laws, proprieties, social conventions and its ethical rules. He is an implacable enemy of this world, and if he continues to live in it, that is only to destroy it more effectively.

(3.) The revolutionary despises all doctrinairism and has rejected the mundane sciences, leaving them to future generations. He knows of only one science, the science of destruction.

To this end, and this end alone, he will study mechanics, physics, chemistry, and perhaps medicine. To this end he will study day and night the living science: people, their characters and circumstances and all the features of the present social order at all possible levels. His sole and constant object is the immediate destruction of this vile order.

(4.) He despises public opinion. He despises and abhors the existing social ethic in all its manifestations and expressions. For him, everything is moral which assists the triumph of revolution. Immoral and criminal is everything which stands in its way.

(5.) The revolutionary is a dedicated man, merciless towards the state and towards the whole of educated and privileged society in general; and he must expect no mercy from them either. Between him and them there exists, declared or undeclared, an unceasing and irreconcilable war for life and death. He must discipline himself to endure torture.

(6.) Hard towards himself, he must be hard towards others also. All the tender and effeminate emotions of kinship, friendship, love, gratitude and even honour must be stifled in him by a cold and single-minded passion for the revolutionary cause. There exists for him only one delight, one consolation, one reward and one gratification—the success of the revolution. Night and day he must have but one thought, one aim—merciless destruction. In cold-blooded and tireless pursuit of this aim, he must be prepared both to die himself and to destroy with his own hands everything that stands in the way of its achievement.

(7.) The nature of the true revolutionary has no place for any romanticism, any sentimentality, rapture or enthusiasm. It has no place either for personal hatred or vengeance. The revolutionary passion, which in him becomes a habitual state of mind, must at every moment be combined with cold calculation. Always and everywhere he must be not what the promptings of his personal inclinations would have him be, but what the general interest of the revolution prescribes.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY TOWARDS
HIS COMRADES IN REVOLUTION

(8.) The revolutionary considers his friend and holds dear only a person who has shown himself in practice to be as much a revolutionary as he himself. The extent of his friendship, devotion and other obligations towards his comrade is determined only by their degree of usefulness in the practical work of total revolutionary destruction.

(9.) The need for solidarity among revolutionaries is self-evident. In it lies the whole strength of revolutionary work. Revolutionary comrades who possess the same degree of revolutionary understanding and passion should, as far as possible, discuss all important matters together and come to unanimous decisions. But in implementing a plan decided upon in this manner, each man should as far as possible rely on himself. In performing a series of destructive actions each man must act for himself and have recourse to the advice and help of his comrades only if this is necessary for the success (of the plan).

(10.) Each comrade should have under him several revolutionaries of the second or third category, that is, comrades who are not completely initiated. He should regard them as portions of a common fund of revolutionary capital, placed at his disposal. He should expend his portion of the capital economically, always attempting to derive the utmost possible benefit from it. Himself he should regard as capital consecrated to the triumph of the revolutionary cause; but as capital which he may not dispose of independently without the consent of the entire company of the fully initiated comrades.

(11.) When a comrade gets into trouble, the revolutionary, in deciding whether he should be rescued or not, must think not in terms of his personal feelings but only of the good of the revolutionary cause. Therefore he must balance, on the one hand, the usefulness of the comrade, and on the other, the amount of revolutionary energy that would necessarily be expended on his deliverance, and must settle for whichever is the weightier consideration.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY TOWARDS SOCIETY

(12.) The admission of a new member, who has proved himself not by words but by deeds, may be decided upon only by unanimous agreement.

(13.) The revolutionary enters into the world of the state, of class and of so-called culture, and lives in it only because he has faith in its speedy and total destruction. He is not a revolutionary if he feels pity for anything in this world. If he is able to, he must face the annihilation of a situation, of a relationship or of any person who is a part of this world—everything and everyone must be equally odious to him. All the worse for him if he has family, friends and loved ones in this world; he is no revolutionary if they can stay his hand.

(14.) Aiming at merciless destruction the revolutionary can and sometimes even must live within society while pretending to be quite other than what he is. The revolutionary must penetrate everywhere, among all the lowest and the middle classes, into the houses of commerce, the church, the mansions of the rich, the world of the bureaucracy, the military and of literature, the Third Section [the Secret Police] and even the Winter Palace.

(15.) All of this foul society must be split up into several categories: the first category comprises those to be condemned immediately to death. The society should compile a list of these condemned persons in order of the relative harm they may do to the successful progress of the revolutionary cause, and thus in order of their removal.

(16.) In compiling these lists and deciding the order referred to above, the guiding principle must not be the individual acts of villainy committed by the person, nor even by the hatred he provokes among the society or the people. This villainy and hatred, however, may to a certain extent be useful, since they help to incite popular rebellion. The guiding principle must be the measure of service the person's death will necessarily render to the revolutionary cause. Therefore, in the first instance all those must be annihilated who are especially harmful to the revolutionary organization, and whose sudden

and violent deaths will also inspire the greatest fear in the government and, by depriving it of its cleverest and most energetic figures, will shatter its strength.

(17.) The second category must consist of those who are granted temporary respite to live, solely in order that their bestial behaviour shall drive the people to inevitable revolt.

(18.) To the third category belong a multitude of high-ranking cattle, or personages distinguished neither for any particular intelligence nor for energy, but who, because of their position, enjoy wealth, connections, influence and power. They must be exploited in every possible fashion and way; they must be enmeshed and confused, and, when we have found out as much as we can about their dirty secrets, we must make them our slaves. Their power, influence, connections, riches and energy thus become an inexhaustible treasure-house and an effective aid to our various enterprises.

(19.) The fourth category consists of politically ambitious persons and liberals of various hues. With them we can conspire according to their own programmes, pretending that we are blindly following them, while in fact we are taking control of them, rooting out all their secrets and compromising them to the utmost, so that they are irreversibly implicated and can be employed to create disorder in the state.

(20.) The fifth category is composed of doctrinaires, conspirators, revolutionaries, all those who are given to idle peroration, whether before audiences or on paper. They must be continually incited and forced into making violent declarations of practical intent, as a result of which the majority of them will vanish without a trace and real revolutionary gain will accrue from a few.

(21.) The sixth, and an important category is that of women. They should be divided into three main types: first, those frivolous, thoughtless, and vapid women who we may use as we use the third and fourth categories of men; second, women who are ardent, gifted, and devoted, but do not belong to us because they have not yet achieved a real, passionless, and practical revolutionary understanding: these must be used like the men of the fifth category; and, finally there are the women

who are with us completely, that is, who have been fully initiated and have accepted our programme in its entirety. We should regard these women as the most valuable of our treasures, whose assistance we cannot do without.

THE ATTITUDE OF OUR SOCIETY TOWARDS THE PEOPLE

(22.) Our society has only one aim—the total emancipation and happiness of the people, that is, the common labourers. But, convinced that their emancipation and the achievement of this happiness can be realized only by means of an all-destroying popular revolution, our society will employ all its power and all its resources in order to promote an intensification and an increase in those calamities and evils which must finally exhaust the patience of the people and drive it to a popular uprising.

(23.) By “popular revolution” our society does not mean a regulated movement on the classical Western model—a movement which has always been restrained by the notion of property and the traditional social order of so-called civilization and morality, which has until now always confined itself to the overthrow of one political structure merely to substitute another, and has striven thus to create the so-called revolutionary state. The only revolution that can save the people is one that eradicates the entire state system and exterminates all state traditions of the regime and classes in Russia.

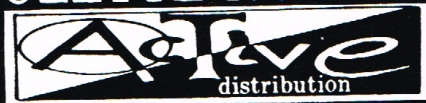
(24.) Therefore our society does not intend to impose on the people any organization from above. Any future organization will undoubtedly take shape through the movement and life of our people, but that is a task for future generations. Our task is terrible, total, universal, merciless destruction.

(25.) Therefore, in drawing closer to the people, we must ally ourselves above all with those elements of the popular life which, ever since the very foundation of the state power of Muscovy, have never ceased to protest, not only in words but in deeds, against everything directly or indirectly connected with the state: against the nobility, against the bureaucracy,

against the priests, against the world of the [merchant] guilds, and against the tight-fisted peasant profiteer. But [we] shall ally ourselves with the intrepid world of brigands, who are the only true revolutionaries in Russia.

(26.) To knit this world into a single invincible and all-destroying force—this is the purpose of our entire organization, our conspiracy, and our task.

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